



**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES**  
*Maryland's Social Services Agency*



**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**DHR USHERS IN NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH BY  
APPLAUDING FAMILIES FROM SOUTHERN MARYLAND**

*Calvert, Charles and Saint Mary's Counties name families of the year*

**BALTIMORE** – The Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) got a head start on celebrating National Adoption Awareness month by honoring families from **Calvert, Charles and Saint Mary's Counties** that contributed to the **770 total adoptions** finalized during fiscal year 2009.

“We have much to celebrate,” said DHR Secretary Brenda Donald. We have seen a 15 percent reduction in the overall number of children in foster care; a 43 percent decline in group home placements; we have recruited 1,500 new foster parents since 2007; and we found families for 770 children during our last fiscal year.”

The successes Donald highlighted were driven by the Department's **Place Matters** initiative. This initiative builds on the premise that nothing matters more to a child than a place to call home.

Each of the local departments of social services honored families from their jurisdiction that adopted during the last year. These families were recognized for their commitment to adoption, their support of the agency's goals, and their efforts to produce the best possible outcomes for children. Southern Maryland jurisdictions honored the following families:

**Calvert County Department of Social Services** recognized **Mary and Jerry Lee**.

For the past three years, Jerry and Mary Lee have been foster/adoptive parents. They also raised six biological children. In October 2008 the Lees adopted a sibling group of four children ranging in age from 4 to 13. The children were originally placed with the Lee's on an emergency basis. The children have made great strides in the Lee home and have a great future with two loving and caring parents.

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**Charles County Department of Social Services** recognized **Sheila and Lionel Carroll**.

The Carroll family was nominated as adoptive family of the year because they are extremely committed to the children in their community. Initially, they wanted to foster one child. However, when called upon to foster three siblings ranging in age from five to ten years -- they willingly opened their home to the children and later adopted them. The Carroll's are patient, kind and willing to go above and beyond. In addition, they work cooperatively with the biological parents when the plan for a foster child is reunification. They honor the relationship between the child and his or her parents.

**Saint Mary's County Department of Social Services** recognized **Vickie and Gary Ferko**.

The Ferkos have been foster parents since 2004 and have fostered over 60 children -- including emergency, overnight, short-term, and long term placements. Mr. and Mrs. Ferko have adopted five children over the years, all with special emotional and/or physical challenges. They have adopted all age groups and love all of the children equally. They have never hesitated to work with children who require multiple medical appointments, experience disabilities, or who face a lifetime of overcoming obstacles. Gary and Vickie have mastered the demands of several complicated medical conditions and are tremendously supportive of all their foster and adoptive children.

The celebration for the families was held at the Baltimore Zoo's Mansion House. In addition to an awards luncheon for their contributions, the families were also treated to an afternoon at the zoo with their children. "This is our 13<sup>th</sup> year of celebrating adoptions with an awards luncheon, but our families will tell you the biggest reward for them was being able to add these wonderful children to their families," Donald stated.

Additional information about this year's honorees can be found by visiting the DHR newsroom at [www.dhr.state.md.us](http://www.dhr.state.md.us) and clicking on the "Newsroom" tab on the left side of the page.

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**The 2009 Families of the Year from jurisdictions across the state include:**

Allegany County	Eugene and Jeanne Miller
Anne Arundel County	Mark and Lisa Walinski
Baltimore City	Donald and Arnissa Ames Brandi Beckner Jim and Julia Forest Avan Howard Mark and Judy Schlothauer
Baltimore County	Jason and Donna Neidinger
Calvert County	Jerry-y and Mary Lee
Caroline County	Ron and Vicky Marquess
Carroll County	Marshall and Chrissie Thompson
Cecil County	Rick and Marianne Shull
Charles County	Lionel and Shelia Carroll
Dorchester County	Joseph and Glenda Smith
Frederick County	Douglas and Maureen Garlock
Garrett County	Danny and Barbara Baker
Harford County	Robert and Yvonne Cossey
Howard County	Deirdre Henderson
Montgomery County	Charlie and Jenni Weller
Prince George's County	Darla Sligh
Queen Anne's County	Mark and Darla Verdonck
St. Mary's County	Gary and Vickie Ferko
Somerset County	Jonathan and Cherry Conley
Talbot County	Deborah Fletcher
Washington County	Tom and Toni Barnhart
Wicomico County	Scott and Amy Ness
Worcester County	Augustine Cook

The Maryland Department of Human Resources is the state's social service provider. The agency collaborates with 24 local jurisdictions to: provide foster care, adoption and protective services to children; collect and distribute child support payments; and provide temporary cash, food stamps and medical assistance to families. It also funds programs for homeless persons, refugees, migrant workers, victims of crime and women who are displaced, battered or assaulted. Last year, DHR served 638,000 people in need. In terms of its annual budget, DHR is Maryland's fourth largest state agency.

- Martin O'Malley, Governor
- Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor
- Brenda Donald, Secretary